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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1988
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2030
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2007
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 1256

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000256

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DEPT FOR SCA/A AND SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/16/2017

TAGS: PREL FAID TI AF

SUBJECT: TAJIK-AFGHAN BRIDGE OPENING COULD HELP HIGHLIGHT SUCCESS IN AFGHAN SPRING OFFENSIVE

REF: (A) DUSHANBE 34, (B) STATE 19371

CLASSIFIED BY: Tom Hushek, Charge d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy Dushanbe, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (d)

¶1. (C) The U.S.-funded bridge between Tajikistan and Afghanistan serves as the most visible symbol of our efforts to link South and Central Asia and establish lasting trade and transportation ties between the two regions. In Tajikistan, where the Chinese, Russians and Iranians have all donated hundreds of millions of dollars to infrastructure projects, the bridge demonstrates to the Tajik people and government that the United States is also committed to investing in Tajikistan's future. The Tajik government fully understands that stability in Afghanistan is a critical ingredient in bringing security and prosperity to Tajikistan; and they remain committed to working with the U.S. Government to bring this about. The bridge's dedication in August could help highlight successes in the spring-summer offensive in Afghanistan by demonstrating a "corridor of stability" from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean.

¶2. (U) The opening of the bridge across the Tajik-Afghan border at Nizhniy Pyanj, scheduled for the first part of August, provides us an unparalleled opportunity to demonstrate transformational diplomacy in action, highlight our policy vision for the region, and garner renewed commitments from the Tajiks and Afghans to establish a secure, prosperous and integrated region. Linking the bridge opening to the launch of a high-profile cross-border commercial convoy laden with Tajik and Central Asian export goods bound for the Indian Ocean (ref A) will extend the public diplomacy value of the bridge opening and emphasize our shared vision of security and prosperity throughout the region.

¶3. (U) In his introductory meeting with the Ambassador January 4, Foreign Minister Zaripov laid out his vision for the bridge opening (ref A). Zaripov's grand vision for the event included:

-- Attendance by both President Rahmonov and President Karzai. The twosome had attended the project's dedication ceremony, and Zaripov noted that Karzai's New Year greeting to Rahmonov mentioned the bridge opening this summer.

-- Visits of high ranking U.S. officials including members of Congress.

-- The launch of a convoy of ten or more commercial trucks loaded with Tajik export goods. The convoy would cross the bridge to Afghanistan, travel through Kunduz, the Salang Tunnel,

Kabul, and Kandahar and proceed through Baluchistan to either Karachi or Gwadar on the coast. This trip of 3000 kilometers to an Indian Ocean port is dramatically shorter than the 7000 kilometers Tajik trade goods now have to travel to the Baltic Sea.

-- Extensive press coverage of the convoy, including international media accompanying the convoy along its entire length and reporting the story of the bridge opening, Afghanistan's functioning road system, and regional integration in general.

¶4. (SBU) Embassy Dushanbe proposes participation by the following U.S. officials:

--Secretary Rice: The bridge opening will help crystallize a message built on the theme of regional economic integration between South and Central Asia. The bridge itself, plus a commercial convoy traveling from Kazakhstan to Karachi will provide ample opportunities to assert our vision of a secure and prosperous region;

-- Secretary Gates: The Army Corps of Engineers has supervised the project and his presence would reinforce our message on regional and border security;

-- A congressional delegation made up of committee members for Foreign Relations, Armed Services, Trade, Commerce, delivering a message about the United States' democratic traditions and the importance of free trade;

-- Members of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce interested in investment opportunities in agriculture, telecom, transportation or energy.

¶5. (C) Action Request: Post requests the Department determine

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the availability and willingness of the Secretary, Secretary Gates and members of Congress to travel to Tajikistan in early August to attend the opening ceremony. When a travel window, or specific date, has been established, we will begin working with the Tajik government to ensure top-level participation. Post will also require assistance in generating interest from international media organizations not present in Tajikistan, and devising sufficient security arrangements for the trans-Afghan commercial convoy.

HUSHEK